

Message Text

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51

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-14 DPW-01 AID-20

INRE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 PM-07 NSC-10 SPC-03 SS-20

RSC-01 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 DODE-00 PRS-01 USIE-00

DRC-01 /138 W

----- 056507

O P 201125Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0198

AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY WARSAW PRIORITY

CINCPAC PRIORITY

COMUSSAG THAI PRIORITY

CMDR JCRC NKP THAI PRIORITY

USDEL FPJMT SAIGON PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 21295

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR VS

SUBJ: RELEASED PA&E ELM DEBRIEFED

PARIS FOR AMBASSADOR MARTIN

1. TWO EMBOFFS AND A DAO REP(A PERSONAL FRIEND) INFORMALLY DEBRIEFED HOMER ELM AT 7THE DAY ADVENTIST HOSPITAL LIBRARY FOR ONE-HALF HOUR PRECEEDING HIS ELEVEN AM PRESS CONFERENCE THIS MORNING. ELM LOOKED FIT AND WAS RELAXED AND PLEASANT. HE IS NOT A DEEP OR SOPHISTICATED PERSON, BUT HE IS WELL-SPOKEN AND RESPONDED WITH EASE TO THE REPORTERS' QUESTIONS, DECLINING ONLY TO EXPRESS HIS GENERAL OPINION OF HIS CAPTORS AND THEIR CAUSE. MOST OF WHAT WAS DISCUSSED DURING THE HALF HOUR PRECEEDING THE PRESS CONFERENCE WAS REPEATED AND IS INCLUDED IN THE TRANSCRIPT WHICH WILL
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FOLLOW SEPTTEL. THERE WERE, HOWEVER, SEVERAL OBSERVA-

TIONS OR RESPONSES TO OUR QUESTIONS WHICH WERE NOT COVERED AGAIN:

A. THE VARIOUS COMMUNIST UNITS THROUGH WHICH HE WAS PASSED HAD RADIOS, AND CONSTANTLY MONITOR RVNAF NETS. ELM FELT THAT COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN UNITS AND WITH HIGHER HEADQUARTERS WERE GOOD AND RAPID. HIS CAPTORS SEEMED, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, TO HAVE PRIOR WARNING (A DAY OR TWO) OF VNAF AIR STRIKES.

B. ALL TRAVEL WAS BY FOOT AND BOAT. HE SAW NO VEHICLES WHATSOEVER.

C. THE MOVEMENT OF HIS CAPTORS WAS FREQUENTLY INHIBITED BY GVN OPERATIONS. HE FELT THAT THEY HAD OFTEN STOPPED OR DETOURED TO AVOID GVN FORCES.

D. THERE SEEMED TO HIM TO BE NO SHORTAGE OF FOOD.

E. HIS CAPTORS STATED THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE TO RETALIATE BY ATTACKING GVN-CONTROLLED TOWN AND "MAIN POINTS" IF THE GVN CONTINUED ITS ATTACKS IN "PRG LIBERATED ZONES." HE HEARD NO MENTION OF AN UPRISING OR GENERAL OFFENSIVES. HE FELT THAT THE MORALE OF THE ENEMY WAS GOOD AND THAT THEY WERE CONFIDENT ULTIMATE VICTORY NOW THAT THE AMERICAN FORCES HAD DEPARTED.

F. ABOUT TEN DAYS PRIOR TO HIS RELEASE, HE WAS TOLD THAT THE PLAF HAD DOWNED AN AMERICAN HELICOPTER WITH 18 PERSONS ABOARD, IN QUANG TRI PROVINCE.

G. WHEN HIS EARLIER PROJECTED RELEASE ON NOV 2 FELL THROUGH, HIS CAPTORS HAD OFFERED NO COMMENT OR EXPLANATION, NOR HAD THEY APPEARED DISCONCERTED. HE HAD ACTUALLY BEEN MARCHED FROM THE CAMP WHERE HE WAS HELD, TO A POINT WHICH HE THOUGHT WAS ON THE VI THANH ROAD. HIS IMPRESSION IS THAT HE WAS TO HAVE BEEN TURNED OVER TO ANOTHER PERSON OR PERSONS, WHO FAILED TO SHOW UP.

H. HE WAS TOLD OF HIS ACTUAL RELEASE ABOUT A WEEK IN ADVANCE.

2. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS CAPTURE ARE COVERED IN THE TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE; HOWEVER, THE MAIN POINTS ARE SUMMARIZED:

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A. ELM WAS AMBUSHED BY A GROUP OF SIX, WHO SAID THEY HAD ARRIVED ON THE SCENE ONLY THREE MINUTES EARLIER FOR THE PURPOSE OF SETTING UP AMBUSH ON ROUTE 4. THE AMBUSH TOOK PLACE AT 7:30 PM, AFTER ELM HAD EXPERIENCED THREE SEPARATE INSTANCES OF VEHICLE BREAKDOWN. THE LIGHTS OF THE VEHICLE WERE ON UNTIL THE SHOOTING BEGAN, AT WHICH TIME ELM STOPPED AND PUT OUT THE LIGHTS. THE AMBUSHERS FIRED FIRST WITH M-16S, THEN AKS; HIS AMBUSHERS HAD A PRC-25, AND USED IT TO MONITOR RVNAF AND TO COMMUNICATE

WITH THE LARGER VC UNIT OF WHICH THEY WERE A PART--SOME ONE THOUSAND FEET OFF, IN A NEARBY VILLAGE.

B. ACCORDING TO HIS CAPTORS, THEY HAD FIRED AT HIS VEHICLE (A THREE QUARTER TON TRUCK) BECAUSE IT HAD NO SMALL RUNNING LIGHTS AT THE TOP OF THE BODY, AS DO VN COMMERCIAL TRUCKS AND BUSES. WHEN THEY DISCOVERED THEY HAD AN ICCS VEHICLE, THEY WERE UNCERTAIN WHETHER THEIR ACTIONS WOULD BE APPROVED OR DISAPPROVED. HOWEVER, THERE WAS ON THE SCENE NO COMMANDER ABLE TO DECIDE PROMPTLY WHAT TO DO WITH THEM. ACCORDINGLY, ELM AND THE TWO VIETNAMESE WERE HELD FOR TWO DAYS ONLY A FEW HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE AMBUSH SITE, WHERE ELM WAS ABLE TO SEE THE ICCS HELICOPTERS WHICH LANDED NEAR THE SITE THE DAY AFTER THE AMBUSH.

C. ELM FEELS HE WAS "FAIRLY ADEQUATELY TREATED." HE WAS NOT PHYSICALLY HARMED, THREATENED, OR EVEN SUBJECTD TO POLITICAL HARANGUES. HE WAS FED TWICE A DAY, THE SAME FOOD EATEN BY HIS CAPTORS. HE WAS SEPARATED FROM THE TWO VIETNAMESE FROM OCT 31 UNTIL SHORTLY BEFORE HIS RELEASE, BUT HE COMMENTED THAT THEY, TOO, HAD BEEN FAIRLY WELL TREATED. ELM FEELS THAT HE WAS HELD FOR A LONG AS HE WAS BECAUSE HE CARRIED PAPERS IDENTIFYING HIM AS A FORMER AIR FORCE MAN, AND HIS CAPTORS NEEDED TIME TO VERIFY HIS PRESENT STATUS.

D. ELM STATED THAT HE COULD NOT TELL IF THE TROOPS TO WHICH HE WAS EXPOSED WERE FRONT-LINE OR REAR-ECHELON TROOPS; SOUTHERNERS OR NORTHERNERS. THEY WORE A VARIETY OF NONDESCRIPT UNIFORMS. VIRTUALLY ALL APPEARED TO HIM TO BE UNDER THE AGE OF 25, WITH MANY WHO LOOKED TO HIM TO BE ONLY 16 OR 17.

E. IN THE AREAS THROUGH WHICH HE PASSED, HE SAW SOME SMALL SETTLEMENTS--SIX TO EIGHT HOUSES--WITH PEOPLE ENGAGED IN FARMING AND FISHING. WHEN ASKED IF ALL OF THESE PEOPLE WERE VC, ELM
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RESPONDED THAT THEY APPEARED TO BE OR AT LEAST CERTAINLY SYMPATHIZERS.

BENNETT

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